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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001945

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: VILLA INSIDER ON HIS BOSS'S HEALTH, NIGER DELTA,
AND OTHER ISSUES

REF: ABUJA 1916

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A presidential insider says his boss focused on the Niger Delta after he realized it undermines his administration's top priorities. He confirmed that Yar'Adua traveled to Saudi Arabia in September for medical treatment, adding that the head of state suffers from lupus. END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT PERSONALLY ENGAGED ON NIGER DELTA

12. (C) Presidential Economic Advisor Sani Musa recently told us that President Yar'Adua decided to focus on the Niger Delta after he realized that stability there affects five of the seven agenda points in his campaign platform agenda. Specifically, he noted, insecurity in the delta undercuts energy generation, economic development, and job creation. Yar'Adua, he said, also recognized that the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) had done little for local communities. While he could not dismantle NDDC for political reasons, he decided to create the Ministry of the Niger Delta to promote development more effectively.

13. (C) Musa claimed that Yar'Adua skipped the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in part, because he wanted to be closer to Nigeria during the critical end phase of the Niger Delta amnesty program. He insisted on being available to receive all major militants who sought to meet with him to accept amnesty.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

14. (C) Musa rejected any perception that Yar'Adua's failure to travel to New York for the UNGA represented an intentional snub against anyone. According to Musa, Yar'Adua personally assured him of the importance he attached to U.S.-Nigerian relations and his desire for greater communication and engagement.

PRESIDENT'S HEALTH

15. (C) Musa confirmed that Yar'Adua traveled to Saudi Arabia in mid September for medical treatment, and stated that Yar'Adua suffers from lupus -- "not necessarily what is reported by the media." He said treatment kept the condition in check but could not provide a cure. While Yar'Adua has good days and bad days, Musa claimed that his overall health had improved during the past several months.

JUSTICE MINISTER POSSIBLY OUT BY DECEMBER

16. (C) Musa said Yar'Adua had become aware of corrupt activities by certain Cabinet members, including Justice Minister Michael Aondoakaa. Claiming that Yar'Adua did not know Aondoakaa before his appointment, Yar'Adua subsequently received evidence of his wrongdoing, including bribe taking, and would sack Aondoakaa by December (reftel).

YAR'ADUA WANTS ELECTORAL REFORM

17. (C) Musa maintained that Yar'Adua genuinely wants electoral reform, recalling that he had acknowledged in his inaugural address the "flawed" process that brought him to power. Yar'Adua, he said, became frustrated at the Justice Qpower. Yar'Adua, he said, became frustrated at the Justice Minister's efforts to block key recommendations, including the more transparent selection of the Independent National

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Electoral Commission chairperson. While dominated by the ruling People's Democratic Party, Musa claimed the National Assembly also thwarted the President's proposals on electoral reform. He accused legislators of demanding bribes before they would enact this legislation.

SACKING OF INTELLIGENCE CHIEF

18. (C) Musa confirmed press reports that Yar'Adua sacked Nigeria Intelligence Agency (NIA) Director General Ambassador Tony Imohe for colluding with Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Joe Keshi in instructing Nigerian foreign missions to deny consular services to self-imposed exiles Nasir El-Rufai and Nuhu Ribadu. Yar'Adua, he said, became angry, noting that even Nigeria's military regimes had never withdrawn the rights of Nigerians to consular services and passports.

COMMENT

19. (C) While very much a loyalist defense of Yar'Adua, the references to venality among ministers, and especially the much derided justice minister, and the National Assembly are worth noting. This is the first time we have heard that Yar'Adua's ailments include lupus.

SANDERS